

READY & PREPARED

/Abbie Darst, Program Coordinator

Appointed as executive director of the Kentucky Office of Homeland Security December 13, 2007, Adam Edelen has an extensive career history in management, administration and strategic planning. Edelen has served as an aide to former Gov. Paul Patton and has worked as a senior executive with both Thomas & King, Inc. and Commerce Lexington. In his new role with KOHS he is charged with ensuring that the commonwealth's families, first responders and communities have the resources they need to be ready and prepared, but showing concern for Kentucky families is not new to Edelen. He has been involved in community leadership for years with organizations such as Kentucky Educational Television and United Way of the Bluegrass. Edelen is a graduate of the University of Kentucky and he and his wife, Catherine, have twin two-year-old boys, Hamilton and Wade.

You have an extremely diverse background in management and administrative experience, most recently for Thomas & King, Inc. and the Lexington Chamber of Commerce. How has your professional experience prepared you for this position as KOHS director?

When Gov. Steve Beshear was making an appointment to run the Kentucky Office of Homeland Security, he felt the state needed somebody with a background in management. This appointee should be someone who had the relationships to go to Washington and make sure that Kentucky kept the federal funnel full of funds, ensuring first responders here have what they need. He was also looking for someone who has a background of working with and coordinating with local public and state officials to make sure Kentucky is able to accomplish its goals. My background as a former aide to a governor, a corporate executive, a non-profit leader, someone who has been active in his community, has developed for me a lot of skill sets that lend themselves very well to this job. We are blessed with 100 years of law enforcement experience on the staff. We have some really incredible, professional folks who have a lot of experience in working with first responders of all stripes. But to run the organization, it really takes someone who has a background in strategic planning, who can clearly define a goal, who is used to leading an organization in the direction of that goal and then measuring the results to make sure we've achieved that goal. As an executive with Thomas & King, which is one of the largest restaurant franchise companies in the country, as the number two at the Lexington Chamber of Commerce and as an aide to Gov. Paul Patton, I have seen all these – I developed all the attributes I think you need to run an organization like this effectively. But an organization is only as effective as its employees, and we're blessed with some terrific talent here. We've got >>

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some folks who have some good institutional memory and have done a good job over the last period of years. We also have some new blood that we've brought in, and the two functions have been very complimentary. So far we're very pleased with the direction we're going in. There's good cohesion on the staff and we're working really well to move our agenda forward.

What were your most significant responsibilities and accomplishments in your service as an aide to former Gov. Patton?

I traveled with Gov. Patton a lot. I worked on constituent matters, and I focused on whatever great policy initiative that he was focused on. Specifically, I spent a lot of time on the workers' comp reforms and the higher education reforms of his administration. Now, I was a support staff. I was very young, so to take credit for any of those great accomplishments in that administration would not be appropriate. But what I did get was a Ph.D. in Kentucky and the issues facing Kentucky. It was a terrific way to be exposed to the challenges, opportunities and issues confronting Kentucky, and I'm forever grateful for that. It was the best job a young person could have and those were some of the most exciting, busiest and happiest times of my life. It was service that served me well in the long term because I became so familiar with the issues that Kentuckians confront every day, and it serves me well certainly in the job I have now.

Having demonstrated a record of community leadership, what is your motivation for your involvement in organizations such as United Way of the Bluegrass and Strong Start?

You have to start from the premise that I love Kentucky. I mean Kentucky is, besides my family, my great passion, so any effort I can give to making it a better place to live and a better place to raise children, I get immediately enthusiastic about. My involvement with United Way as chairman of the annual campaign, my work with the Prichard Committee in Strong Start Kentucky and the work I've done with KET is all focused on a belief that education is what helps Kentucky, over the long term, realize its potential. I'm particularly interested in early childhood development. It's an issue that Patton began to address while he was governor. Certainly Gov. Beshear has a large focus on expanding pre-K opportunities for young people across Kentucky, and I think that over the long term the way that we help Kentucky to realize its potential is by investing in young people and making sure we have a world-class system of education. If, over the long term, we're going to catch up, not just catch up with the rest of the nation, but be able to compete globally, our young people have to be skilled and educated in a way that lends them the opportunity to be able to compete. And I'm excited about being part of that.

You have accomplished a lot throughout your career at a relatively young age. What do think has been the key to your success thus far?

Wow, there have been a lot of people who have accomplished a lot at a young age. If I have had any successes it's first because of great mentors who've given me the opportunity to succeed and demonstrate my work ethic. Then second is work ethic. You have to be committed – you're only as good as your work is. I have a real passion for the things that I've been involved in. So when you're passionate about the subject matter, it's very easy to have the work ethic you need to move forward. But I've been blessed with a lot of good luck, a lot of good mentors and have worked really hard myself.

How long do you see yourself being involved with the Office of Homeland Security – where do you see yourself in five or ten years?

My leadership with the KOHS I don't foresee as being a short-term thing. In the past administration we had three directors in one term. While those were all good, quality people who made contributions in their own special way, what this organization really needs is some continuity of leadership. The governor, ultimately, will decide how long I'm here, but we're committed to being here for the long haul, to make clear to our partners in law enforcement and first responders that we're here, things aren't going to change, we're committed to a strategic plan and we're going to see it through. Also, our partner organizations need to know they can count on us and there's not going to be a significant change in leadership.

As the director of the Kentucky Office of Homeland Security, in what direction do you plan to take KOHS in the coming year?

We're going to maintain doing those things that the organization has done well. Most notably we're going to roll out the eWarrants program statewide, which is incredibly important. We're going to focus on excellence in training and providing a wonderful product to first responders across the state. And we're going to continue to make sure that they have the resources they need to continue to do their job. At the end of the day, the real role of the office of homeland security is to make sure that our first responders have the resources they need to protect the people of Kentucky. We define resources as training, equipment, knowledge and know how. So that's our focus. Where I'm going to put my own special stamp on the organization is bringing a much more external focus to the organization. To be focused on law enforcement, to be focused on what we do here and the coordination is a very good thing, but if you're not engaging policy makers in Washington, at the state capitol and in county seats, you're not realizing the full potential of the organization.

So I'm going to be spending a lot more time in Washington to make sure that our first responders are getting their fair share of the federal funding. I'm going to be working in cities and counties to make sure that we are working hand in hand with our local leaders to ensure we're doing all we can to be a great partner to them. We are also going to be working directly with the public to make sure they are engaged in helping us make this a safe state. Government can't do everything. The office of homeland security and first responders can't provide every bit of security for the people in Kentucky. The people themselves have an obligation to help us in this. We're going to take that message to them and I'm optimistic they will respond like Kentuckians always do.

Are there any programs you have set in place to get that message out to the public?

We're still in the early, conceptual stage, but we're trying to develop a program that will certify communities as ready and prepared. We will develop a really strong set of criteria that says if a community achieves these goals and objectives, we'll certify them as ready and prepared. Part of that is, obviously, having the correct training and the right equipment, but a major component is going to be having some kind of apparatus for engaging the public – our private citizens – in making their community safer. Again, government can't do it all, but we can help facilitate and create the relationships that will provide for a much more secure Kentucky.

How much of the groundwork for this type of program already laid by the Kentucky Community Preparedness Program will you use in this community certifying program?

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It's provided a very good foundation, and certainly our partnership with Department of Criminal Justice Training along with the public awareness campaign has created some recognition of the Kentucky Office of Homeland Security. But now it's our mission to attach some meat to that recognition, let people know not just what we are, but what we do and how we can partner with them to create a more secure Kentucky for everybody.

How do you see KOHS interacting with local law enforcement and first responders in keeping Kentucky's communities safe and prepared?

This isn't one of these things where we can say it would be nice to really work hand in glove with each other, we must. The fact of the matter is, if we don't have a positive working relationship with our first responders, it puts lives at risk. Everyone here knows that we have made



>> clear to everyone involved that tornados and terrorists don't make partisan distinctions and neither will the Kentucky Office of Homeland Security. This is about not getting engaged in politics. It's not about pitting rural versus urban, this is about making all of Kentucky as safe as we can.

So, with that said, we think that approach creates trust, and anytime you're developing a stronger relationship, in this case between the office of homeland security and our first responders, they need to know we're not here to be political. Our only focus is to make sure they have the resources they need to provide for the safety of the people in Kentucky. So operating from that, we're going to be very aggressive in making sure that the training we do is relevant and effective for our first responders. We're going to make sure that the grant program is administered in such a way that supports them and their mission. We are here to be a strong supporter of first responders. There's not enough public support for first responders and we're here to be a coordinator and an advocate for the good work they do.

My background is not law enforcement and in that regard, when you have the leadership of law enforcement or first responders, a lot of times what you get is, 'well I'm for the red light guys or the blue light guys,' and I don't have a dog in that fight. My focus is to be an excellent administrator and to make sure the funds are coming to Kentucky so we can place them for the people who most need them to do their job. I'm interested in making sure everybody gets a fair shake. I do think, however, the rivalries created between these three entities are manufactured by folks who are not among those three entities. So, closer coordination among the three of them, closer coordination with this office and developing a reputation for not being political, but instead being focused on helping these folks do what they do so well is going to be the hallmark in my tenure here as head of homeland security.

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What type of interaction would you like to see KOHS have with grassroots organizations geared toward public awareness and emergency response?

The grassroots leadership that has been involved in homeland security needs to know that they are a major priority of this office. They are the best vehicle we in the agency have for communicating with and engaging the public as a whole. We're not going to go around them, we're not going to go over them, instead we're going to partner with them – working hand in hand to get the message out to the public. There's been some very good citizen involvement in the office of homeland security. It has not, however, been the priority. As part of our external focus, it's going to be a major priority. We're excited about engaging the public. We're pleased that we have the citizen involvement we have now, but three or four years from now when we look back, we'll

know the involvement that existed presently served as a launching pad and it will be dramatically different and a lot better, even than it is today.

How will KOHS work with the governor's office and other governmental entities to ensure Kentucky's emergency response and preparedness needs are met?

It's important that people know that I report directly to the governor. I am a gubernatorial appointee and I have the governor's ear on homeland security and first responder issues. Beyond the governor, it's also working hand in hand with our federal congressional delegation, specifically congressmen Rogers and Chandler. A state this size is blessed to have two members of the Appropriations Committee being from here. We are in constant contact with both congressmen and their offices to make sure Kentucky gets its fair share. At the end of the day, we don't care if it's a republican approach or a democratic approach. We'll work with anybody, we'll coordinate with anyone, to make sure our first responders are getting the resources necessary to do their job. Frankly, we don't care who gets credit and when you don't care who gets credit, you tend to get a lot more done. My only focus and the only focus of this office is to make sure those resources are available.

What are you most looking forward to in your tenure as the director of KOHS?

At the end of my period of leadership here, I'm looking forward to a Kentucky that has a working, interoperable communications system. I'm looking forward to this office further developing its reputation as a really good and honest partner with first responders. We're looking forward to successful implementation of the eWarrants program, which we hope will help solve the backlog of 300,000 warrants in Kentucky, 20 percent of which are criminal warrants. We look forward to having had a very successful administration

in which our first responder partners, law enforcement partners and our partners in making public policy recognize this office as a truly outstanding partner – one who made a real difference and will continue to make an even larger difference in the future.

As far as making Kentucky's communication system more operable, what types of things do you plan to put in place to make that more of a reality?

Long before I became director of homeland security, I remember reading the 9/11 commission report, which essentially came back and had two real recommendations. One was information and intelligence sharing and the second was interoperable communications – making sure that our first responders can talk to one another. And the fact that six years later, while Kentucky has



become a national leader, we're still not where we need to be and that is a black mark against the organization and, beyond that, a black mark against the nation. Six years is a long time and we should have gotten our act together before now. I don't know whose fault that is and I'm not here to assign blame, but I am here to say it is a major objective of this office, at least in Kentucky, to make sure we allocate resources, equipment and training in such a way to create a truly interoperable system of communication that works for all our partners.

What do you foresee as one of the biggest challenges facing KOHS in the coming year?

The seminal challenge to this organization is the reduction in funding coming from the federal level. Since the formation of this office we have administered somewhere close to \$140 million in grants, but what we've seen in the last year or two is a marked decline in the federal allocation to Kentucky. That is our biggest challenge and it's also why I want all our partners and first responders to know that's why I'm going to be spending so much time in Washington working with our federal delegation, pleading our case to the Department of Homeland Security, being such a strong and passionate advocate for our partners. Because our ability to do the things we need to do, to create an interoperable communication system and to provide for the security of the people in Kentucky is directly related to the amount of funding we can get from the federal government, I'm going to be spending a lot of time focused on that issue.

Are there any additional information, issues or topics you want to share with the law enforcement community about KOHS?

I want to talk about the importance of continuity – I want to revisit that. I'm pleased to have retained Lt. Col. Shelby Lawson who, after 28 years with the Kentucky State Police, retired and has been deputy director for operations here. He is a real bright light in the department and he is someone that everyone, all of our partners at the local, state and federal level from the FBI to local departments of emergency management, trust. He's a major player here and, if law enforcement is concerned about where they stand with the office of homeland security, they need to look no further than Shelby Lawson's critical role here in the office. He is a major player and a significant leader here, and he is of the law enforcement community. I would encourage our partners to look at his placement in his leadership role here with a great deal of enthusiasm.

I'm also ably assisted by Chuck Geveden, who as Chief Administrative Of-

ficer, helps with the day-to-day operation of KOHS. Chuck has over a decade in law enforcement experience, having worked as an on-the-streets police officer. He also worked as an EMT, so his perspective and expertise on these issues is very important in working with our security partners.

Also, a big part of our awareness are the security summits we have begun to launch. We're going to be going around the state gathering local elected leaders, first responders and members of the law enforcement community together and we're going to have security summits. We are going to discuss where we are as a community, what our needs are and what our end goal is. Then we're going to work from that to develop a plan for how we get there in local communities. A big piece of that is folks being aware of the grants that are available. I think there is a misnomer people may have that there is this big federal allotment that is just given to us, and then we dole it out. Actually, that is not the case at all. Kentucky first must, based on the national security priorities, make an application to the Department of Homeland Security to get the money, and then, when the money is awarded to us, we're able to disperse it through a competitive application process. But the sense that we just get this lump sum of money and then are free to dole it out however we wish is a mischaracterization.

So a big part of doing that effectively under the system that we have is making sure communities are working hand in hand with the office of homeland security about awareness of how the grant program works, what types of things are most likely to get funding and what the critical areas that need funding are. We want to help them through the process and not just be an agency that says, 'this is the paperwork, you figure it out and we'll let you know – we'll give you the yay or nay sign.' That's not going to be our approach at all. Our approach is to be a good partner from the point the application process is begun, all the way to the end. Turning down applications is not what we are here to do. Our goal is to make sure as many people can be funded as possible. Because the need is great, we want to make sure that we're able to allocate as much as possible. But a big part of successful grant applications is an awareness of how the system works. Knowing what to avoid and knowing what to magnify – these are the sorts of things we need here. We have a terrific grant staff. Gene Kiser, our deputy director for grants and finance, is a career state government employee who's been a leader in many different areas, who has administered grants, both large and small, throughout his career. He is well regarded across Kentucky as one of the most able grant administrators in terms of making the applicants feel like they are part of the process and that we're there to assist them. Having a major customer-service mentality is going to be a huge part of how we run the office of homeland security. J